



City of Seattle
Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

NEWS RELEASE

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Mayor Plants Seed to Dramatically Expand Tree Cover in Seattle *Program aims to reverse slide and add nearly 650,000 trees over 30 years*

SEATTLE – Mayor Greg Nickels today called on Seattle to reverse a decades' long slide in the amount of tree cover by planting hundreds of thousands of new trees on private and public land across the city.

The mayor set a goal of increasing Seattle's tree coverage by two-thirds over the next 30 years – or by about 650,000 new trees. To help launch the effort, the mayor announced the city will give away 2,000 coupons for free trees this fall.

The push comes as part of the city's first-ever comprehensive plan for managing, restoring and expanding Seattle's endangered urban forest, which has suffered a dramatic decline since the early 1970s.

“Restoring our urban forests is one of the most important environmental contributions we can make for our city and the planet,” Nickels said. “We can all help turn back the threat to our forests, whether it's by planting trees in our yards or volunteering in our forested parks. Today I challenge every resident to plant a tree in your yard this fall.”

Nickels placed special emphasis on the need for residential property owners to plant and care for new trees, while noting the important role businesses and city departments play in restoring the city's tree cover.

The draft Urban Forest Management Plan, an element of Nickels' Green Seattle Initiative, comes as the city's trees face unprecedented decline brought about by invasive plants, a history of uneven maintenance, development pressure, and old age.

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Seattle's tree cover has shrunk from 40 percent of the city's land area in 1972 to just 18 percent today, a decline that threatens nature's ability to help manage storm water, reduce erosion, absorb climate-disrupting gases and clean the air.

In announcing the plan, Nickels highlighted three early actions to focus the community on the importance of trees to the city:

- The Mayor's Fall Tree Planting Challenge. To spark the challenge, Mayor Nickels announced in October the city will give away 2,000 trees to residents who apply for a Plant-a-Tree-for-Free coupon at www.seattle.gov or at community centers throughout the city.
- A Seattle Department of Transportation and Seattle Parks and Recreation program to plant trees on streets and in parks in Rainier Beach and Georgetown.
- Creation of the Emerald City board, which could include residents and business representatives, environmentalists and others, that will propose incentives and policies to encourage residential and commercial property owners to preserve existing trees and plant new ones.

The mayor's proposed 2007-2008 budget will include more money to help Seattle's urban forests, including an additional \$500,000 for park trees and an added \$40,000 for the Neighborhood Matching Fund Tree Program. The Bridging the Gap proposal before voters this fall includes \$1.5 million in 2007 and 2008 to maintain and expand street trees.

The draft forest plan, a product of the city's departments of Parks and Recreation, Sustainability and Environment, Planning and Development, Transportation, Neighborhoods, Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities, will be presented to the City Council Sept. 12. The public can comment through Oct. 20. Public meetings are set for 11:30 a.m. on Sept. 23 at the Meadowbrook Community Center and 7 p.m. on Sept. 26 at the Jefferson Community Center.

The draft plan points out the problems confronting Seattle's nearly 1.4 million trees and outlines solutions intended to grow that number by some 650,000 over 30 years.

While city departments have taken positive steps to save and restore the forest through plantings funded by capital improvement projects and the Neighborhood Matching Fund, and by regulating clearing associated with development, the decline has accelerated.

Invasive plants, such as English Ivy, pests and disease, inadequate age and species diversity, development and insufficient maintenance are among the factors contributing to a situation in which our city forests could become ecological dead zones within 20 years.

The plan aims to reverse the trend by establishing aggressive goals, such as:

- Adding nearly 650,000 trees over 30 years on property in all land use categories.
- Increasing pruning frequency of city-maintained trees from every 19 years to an industry-standard cycle of every 13 years.
- Creating a long-term program to educate residents about the ecological and economic importance of trees. Residential trees today account for 42 percent of the city's total canopy.
- Devising incentives and regulations that encourage tree preservation and planting.
- Coordinating tree management across multiple city departments with tree maintenance responsibility (Parks, Transportation, City Light, Seattle Public Utilities), including a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the urban forest.
- Creating citizen-government-business partnerships to bring additional financial, volunteer labor and management resources to the tree-restoration fight.

Following the comment period, the city's Urban Forests Coalition, composed of the departments contributing to the plan, will finalize the plan. To view the draft Urban Forest Management Plan, please visit www.seattle.gov/environment.

Visit the mayor's web site at www.seattle.gov/mayor. Get the mayor's inside view on initiatives to promote transportation, public safety, economic opportunity and healthy communities by signing up for The Nickels Newsletter at www.seattle.gov/mayor/newsletter_signup.htm

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